

TESTIMONY - MARCH 6, 2012 - AT 11 AM (HIGHER ED)

GOOD MORNING, MY NAME IS TOKUJI OKAMOTO. I AM A PROGRAM SUPERVISOR AT OUR PIECE OF THE PIE, A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY IN HARTFORD, SERVING YOUNG PEOPLE, AGES 14-24. OUR MISSION IS TO HELP URBAN YOUTH BECOME SUCCESSFUL ADULTS.

A KEY COMPONENT OF OUR PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS MODEL IS OUR CAREER SERVICES. WE HAVE SEEN OVER AND OVER AGAIN THE IMPACT A MEANINGFUL WORK EXPERIENCE HAS ON A YOUNG PERSON. YOUTH THAT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK IN THEIR TEENAGE YEARS ARE MORE LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO HAVE STEADY EMPLOYMENT OVER THE COURSE OF THEIR LIFETIME. THEY ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO STAY IN SCHOOL AND MAKE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THEIR CAREER GOALS. AND OF COURSE YOUTH THAT ARE EMPLOYED ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO ENTER THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

IT IS CRITICAL TO ENGAGE BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYERS IN OUR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORK. WE OFFER A NUMBER OF SERVICES TO DEVELOP CAREER COMPETENCIES THROUGH CLASSROOM AND INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES. ONCE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY TO WORK WE NEED WORKSITES TO HIRE THEM.

WE STRONGLY URGE LEGISLATORS TO PASS SB 291. CONNECTICUT NEEDS A COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM WITH INCENTIVES FOR BUSINESSES TO HIRE YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR CITIES. A TAX CREDIT WOULD GO A LONG WAY TO ENCOURAGING EMPLOYERS TO DO THIS.

WE ARE CURRENTLY IN THE HARDEST ECONOMIC TIMES SINCE THE GREAT DEPRESSION. THIS RECESSION HAS HIT URBAN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND YOUNG PEOPLE THE HARDEST. SB 291 WOULD BE AN INVESTMENT IN OUR FUTURE WORKFORCE AND HAVE IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO THE STATE.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF THIS LEGISLATION.